

Story 1907 (1995 Tape 4)

Narrator: Unidentified  
housewife

Antalya: Antalya, capital  
of Antalya Province

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A Laz<sup>1</sup> Parachutist and the Virgin Mary

There was a Laz once who reported for military duty.<sup>2</sup> When he arrived at the military headquarters, he was assigned to the Turkish Air Force. He was told that sometime during his tour of duty he would be required to make at least one parachute jump.

On a day when such jumps were to be made, this Laz and several of his companions were loaded into a large plane and carried aloft. As the plane was gaining altitude, one of the friends of the Laz explained to him once again how to use the parachute. This friend happened to be a Christian.

The friend said, "After you have jumped out of the plane, pull the right-hand cord to open the regular

<sup>1</sup>The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition, Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustified.

<sup>2</sup>All Turkish men in good health are required to complete a period of military service.

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parachute. If that parachute does not open, pull the left-hand cord to open the emergency parachute. If that one also fails to open, you have only one choice left, and that is to pray to the Virgin Mary<sup>3</sup> for help."

The friend jumped first, and then it was the turn of the Laz. The Laz pulled the right-hand cord, but nothing happened. Next he pulled the left-hand cord, and still no parachute opened. He then called to his friend, who was descending more slowly, "Quick! Tell me again the name of that lady!

<sup>3</sup>In Turkish the Virgin Mary is called Meryem Ana, literally Mother Mary.